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## EDITORIAL NOTES

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In the development of our educational system the organization of the activities of the pupils in the home is rather behind that found in the best schools. This is partly because of the feeling that it is the school's function to utilize all the time of the pupil not actually needed for recreation, and partly because the modern home, for various reasons, does not always seem to be just the place where children are needed.

### **Home Work for Children**

The question of home work for pupils rests upon debatable ground. There are parents who expect the school to make the demand, and they are willing so to free the children from other duties that they may meet it. The picture of schoolboys and schoolgirls of other days trudging along from school to home with a load of books indicative of tasks that must be worked out before next day; and from home to school with the same burden, but with problems that have been solved by the fireside — this picture is too vivid in the memory and imagination of most parents for them to realize easily that there may be a good school without such outside preparation.

### **Home Work in the Past**

It would seem, however, as the present movement toward a unification of the interests of the home and school go forward, that the school, directly, will furnish less rather than more home work for the children. If the school properly performs its function of giving the pupil a day filled with educative work, it is difficult to see why it ought still to pursue him into the period that he should have for recreation, or into the hours when he would better be asleep. After a business man has spent a day in his office or store; or, after a farmer has driven his plow or harvested his grain or cultivated his crops during the day, neither the one nor the other feels that he ought to have "home work" of the same kind. Even the well-disciplined professional man knows that his "home work" should

### **Less, Not More, Home Work**

follow some new channels of thought, if he is to recuperate himself properly for the next day, and if he is to endure.

There seems to be no valid objection to applying the same line of argument to the work of the children. In the course of a day, some six hours in length, a pupil will have, perhaps, some work in wood, clay-modeling, cooking, textiles, gymnastics, drawing and painting, with enough of reading, writing, and arithmetic along with it all to keep every moment properly and fully employed. This is legitimate work, and there is plenty of it as long as it lasts. But after school, when the home takes hold, what then? In the past, when school was almost wholly a matter of books, the assignment of home work was easy. So many pages were set off to be read; so many problems in arithmetic to be solved; so many questions in geography to be answered — it was all beautifully definite and very easy.

But conditions have vastly changed. There is not one home in a thousand that has any provision for enabling the pupil to carry forward any of the hand-work that he is doing in school, even if it be admitted that he should do so. In reading, we no longer use a single book, to be completed in a certain time by taking a fixed amount each day. The reading is from a library of books, large or small, and it is not easy for the home to provide the necessary conditions. In arithmetic the tendency is to solve problems when they arise, and the same principle applies to most of the subjects which used to be considered legitimate for home work. It is generally recognized now, also, that these subjects can be studied with much greater advantage and much more economically in the school, under the immediate direction of the teacher, than elsewhere. Most of the academic work of the pupils that can be done outside of school, therefore, is coming to be of an incidental and general character.

It must not be inferred, though, that the school no longer demands a preparation for the duties with which it invests the children. It indeed requires a more delicate and refined preparation for work than ever before. This is true because its work is now carefully planned with a deeper appreciation of child character and a truer insight

**Homes Not  
Prepared**

**Home Prepara-  
tion Needed**

into the essential things which develop it. The home influence was once considered sufficient if it sent the children to school able to say words and recite formulæ. But everybody knows nowadays that that preparation is of the cheapest kind, in terms of human worth, and that it is the easiest possible to provide. The "home work" of the children that is most valuable to the modern school is not that which can be accomplished mainly by the mouthing of words, or the conning of pages, but rather by means analogous to those which send the merchant back refreshed to his store, the lawyer to his client, the minister to his pulpit, the farmer to his field—all rejoicing in a new day.

That this end may be attained, there are several important things that the home can do by way of preparation. In the first place, it is necessary that the hygienic conditions of the pupils be carefully looked after. Proper food, in right amounts and at proper times; sound sleep, with plenty of outdoor life, will bring a mental rush and enthusiasm to the school that will immensely increase the efficiency of teaching in hundreds of cases. Health, then, first, and above everything else—health! Better a thousand times to be ahead in health and behind in his classes, according to the ordinary standards of estimating academic standing, than for the pupil to be ahead of his grade and behind in health.

In the second place, the school has a right to expect that the home shall give the pupil a preparation of spirit. This it cannot do, however, unless the parents are willing to study the school thoughtfully and continuously, that they may in a measure understand its aims and the methods by which it seeks to realize them. There is no more pathetic figure in a schoolroom than a boy or girl who oscillates between a home that is pulling in one direction and a school that is moving in another.

In the next place, as "home work," the school requires that the spirit of responsibility and helpfulness which it seeks to develop be strongly supported by some kind of useful productive activity about the household. The school tries to engender this spirit through its peculiar duties;

the home must do the same. The intellectual and moral leakage of character that takes place after school hours, on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, through idleness, is enormous, and for this the home is jointly responsible with the school.

An eighth-grade teacher recently asked her pupils to write out a description of their home duties, and the answers read as though the writers were all the children of widows. Most of these papers showed that the real "home work," to put it mildly, is of an aimless and desultory character, and that it is provided for mainly by the mothers. It is safe to say that if the school were not organized on a sounder basis of industry than such homes, its continued existence could not be insured. The school certainly cannot expect to make much headway in creating feelings of responsibility in six hours, if during the rest of the day the pupils are freed from everything that involves it.

**Home Duties  
of Children**

The demand of the modern school for this kind of "home work" is difficult to meet, because it strikes at the center of the organization of the home as a social unit. The replies of the pupils, in the case referred to above, show that there is but little chance in many households for the children to participate in actual home-building, and but little attempt to organize systematically the meager opportunities that do exist. As a result, when the pupils come to school they are generally careless, thoughtless, and irresponsible.

**Bad Habits in  
the Home**

It is to this lack of a co-ordinating influence on the part of the home, rather than to any adolescent peculiarities, that pupils so easily form themselves into societies of different kinds, which are a feeble attempt to organize their young energies toward some definite end. Psychologists try to account for these on different grounds, but the cold fact is that adolescence is as old as the race itself, while fraternities and sororities at that period are comparatively new, and their history strikingly coincides with the marked changes that are taking place in the homes.

**Fraternities  
and Sororities**

These changes are many and, indeed, of a vital character. Looking at it from the side of the school, the father as a moral force has practically disappeared. As far as his influence upon the school goes, he has become in the home a rudimentary organ, a kind of vermiform appendix, usually passive, but sometimes he becomes stirred into pernicious activity and makes trouble—generally over the long-distance telephone. The much-deprecated exodus of men from the teacher's profession is not to be deplored half so much as the fact that the father as a strong organizing educational force in the family has become as rare as the dodo.

**Where Is the Father?**

The conditions have changed, too, for the mother. With most of her ancient industries taken from her hands by the great factories of various kinds, she naturally has turned her time to account in other directions. There are few women today who are not more or less involved in some form of public life, the influence of which is not directly of the old home-making type.

**The Mother**

Other changes, too, of a disintegrating character have taken place. The Lares and Penates of the ancient family life have long since tumbled from their niches by the fireside. The morning and evening prayers that once called the family together around a common altar have passed away, taking out of home life one of the subtlest influences ever felt in the organization of the family. Steeped as they were in superstition, they yet served a mighty purpose. Twice a day the family as a whole came together to voice in common their hopes and aspirations; by moral contact as by touch of elbow they inspired each the other to stand firm in a common cause, and the sorrows of one were softened by the sympathy of all. What matters the quibble whether or not prayers are answered from the Great Beyond! While it existed, this daily moral inventory of the essentials of living, the daily fusing and blending of the individual with the family spirit, whatever else it may have done, in the minds of those who participated, it forever fixed the family as the unit of social life. And the modern household, as yet, has devised

**Lack of Coordinating Influences**

nothing that exactly takes its place. This does not mean, necessarily, that the world has ceased to grow better; we are simply to realize that it is growing to be different from what it used to be.

The lack of solidarity in home influence toward the development of feelings of responsibility for definite results having an actual value is the greatest obstacle in the way of the modern school. The new school is as anxious for the pupils to have "home work" as are the parents, but the need is for that of a different type. Home work for the pupils carefully organized by the parents out of the many duties of the common household will do more to increase the efficiency of the schools than all the midnight oil that can be burned in pondering over books. And, on the other hand, a more careful organization of school duties in the light of the home's demands will go a long way toward the nourishment of the family spirit. The proper way to examine a school is to make an inquiry as to the influence of the pupil at home and as to his aspirations as they work themselves out in the family relations. The report cards generally go in the wrong direction; they should be made out by the parents, not by the teachers. The most serious criticism a teacher can get is to have the parent inquire as to his child's progress in school.

The best home work for the pupil, therefore, as a preparation for his lessons in school, is that which generates a feeling of responsibility in the family life; in a word, what is needed is the development of an *attitude of mind* that faces toward efficiency and usefulness as naturally and unconsciously as the leaf turns toward the sun. With this as a foundation, the schools can advance to levels of conduct and scholarship that as yet have never been realized.

W. S. J.